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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PROP](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [RS](#) [ZK](#)
SUBJECT: THE CIS NEEDS A CNN RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE SERVICE

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard E. Hoagland, Ambassador, EXEC, Embassy
Dushanbe.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) This message is Central Asia specific, but it is relevant to the other countries of the former Soviet Union, including Russia, as the other U.S. ambassadors to CIS countries agreed during a January 4 meeting in the Department with U/S Burns.

12. (C) Russia is increasingly flexing its political and economic muscles in the region. In principle, there is nothing wrong with this, but it is doing so as a way to carve out a "sphere of influence" - a concept that the United States rejects. A World Bank study released on January 31 warned that two blocs are forming in Europe-Eurasia - a relatively rich and traditionally liberal bloc identified with Western values, and a poorer, authoritarian bloc in the former Soviet Union led by Russia.

13. (C) It has become clear that Russia's goal is to limit the influence and presence of the West in "Russia's bloc" to the fullest extent possible. The unrelenting Kremlin attack on U.S. democracy NGOs over the past 18 months, asserting they are U.S. intelligence-agency tools working to overthrow existing governments in order to encircle, isolate, and weaken Russia, has been especially harmful. Russia's promise, yet to be delivered, of massive investments in Central Asia gives these governments less reason to pursue economic reform to meet international standards. And so, both our political and economic agendas for this region are increasingly challenged.

14. (C) In Central Asia, 90 percent and more of the population rely on television and, to a slightly lesser extent, radio for news, information, and general world-view. Even poor villages bristle with satellite dishes. What is available to these populations is state-controlled broadcast media and, most popular of all, Russian television broadcasts. Russian television is now state-controlled, and the Russian press is increasingly state-influenced. Because of this, it is increasingly hard to get the U.S. message to the general public in Central Asia. What the people know about the United States

and its policies is largely what the Kremlin wants them to know - and that is not to the benefit of the United States.

¶5. (C) Traditional U.S. public diplomacy will always have a role to play, but it relies increasingly on Internet-based products. Internet is still not broadly used in Central Asia, especially at home, and users who do access our sites are a specialized, self-selecting audience likely to be already well-disposed toward the United States. Speakers, artists, and other special programs are one-off events. They are almost always extremely well-received and make a momentary splash, but they reach a miniscule portion of the population.

¶6. (C) RFE/RL radio broadcasts reach at very best 15 percent of the population, VOA radio much less, and VOA TV programs, where they are rebroadcast (not in Tajikistan), reach even fewer. In theory, the United States could mount a major new broadcast effort, but considering priorities and budget limitations we acknowledge that is most unlikely. Further, the generally literate adult populations of Central Asia lived under the Soviet media regime, and the younger part of the population has grown up with rigidly controlled, and head-bangingly boring, state broadcasts. All want something independent from government, including from the U.S. government.

¶7. (C) We need to think outside the box. One way to achieve this would be through a Russian-language service of CNN International. CNN already has language services - e.g., Arabic, Turkish, Spanish - and in theory could initiate a Russian service. The demographics would seem to be promising, with an increasingly wealthy Russia, and also Kazakhstan. In fact, EUR DAS Bryza is aware of a generally progressive (for the region) broadcasting corporation in Kazakhstan that might welcome a joint venture with CNN that could broadcast direct by

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satellite throughout the CIS.

¶8. (C) CNN Russian service would be beneficial for the entire CIS, not the least Russia, especially as Moscow moves toward the 2008 presidential election, and beyond. The World Bank report emphasizes that the emergence of two blocs in Europe-Eurasia is not yet necessarily a given. We should do everything possible to ensure that we do not drift into an ideological Cold War-II.

¶9. (C) If the Department decides it is worthwhile to pursue a CNN Russian option, the point of contact is CNN International Managing Director Chris Cramer (404-827-3491). We would suggest that the best contact from the Department to initiate this discussion would perhaps be U/S Hughes or U/S Burns.
HOAGLAND